

Check your optician is registered



I'm registered
01-1234

General Optical Council

www.optical.org

This booklet tells you who we, the General Optical Council (GOC), are. It also tells you what we do and how our services can help you.

About us

We regulate opticians, students training to be opticians and optical businesses in the UK. There are currently around 23,500 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses on our registers. Our powers come from the Opticians Act 1989.

What do the different words mean?

An **optometrist** is the person who tests your sight. They can also fit and supply glasses or contact lenses.

A **dispensing optician** is the person who fits and supplies your glasses or contact lenses.

Ophthalmologists and **ophthalmic medical practitioners (OMPs)** are medically-qualified doctors who specialise in eye conditions. They are also allowed to test your sight and fit and supply glasses and contact lenses. Ophthalmologists and OMPs are registered by the General Medical Council. In this booklet we describe optometrists and dispensing opticians as '**opticians**'. We describe people who are registered with us as '**registrants**'. We use these terms to make it clearer for you.

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What is regulation?

Regulators protect the public by:

- restricting who can practise a profession;
- making sure that their registrants are suitably qualified; and
- making sure that their registrants are fit to practise safely.

We are one of nine healthcare regulators in the UK. The other regulators are:

- the General Chiropractic Council;
- the General Dental Council;
- the General Medical Council;
- the General Osteopathic Council;
- the Health Professions Council;
- the Nursing and Midwifery Council;
- the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland; and
- the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

We are independent of the Government. Our work is reviewed by a separate organisation called the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE).

Why is it important to have regular eye tests?

Regular eye examinations should be part of your health routine. An eye examination is not just to check whether or not you need glasses to see long distances or read easily.

An eye examination can also find any underlying health problems, like high blood pressure or diabetes. During an eye examination your optician will be able to check for more serious eye conditions like glaucoma or macular degeneration (AMD).

To find out more about having an eye examination, go to **www.lookafteryoureyes.org** (a website set up by the College of Optometrists).

Why is it important that my optician is registered?

It's important to know your optician is registered because only then can you be confident that the person looking after your eyes is properly trained and fit to practise.

If someone calls themselves an optician when they are not registered with us, they are breaking the law.

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How can the GOC help me?

We can help you check that an optician, student or optical business is registered with us.

You can search our registers to check that an optician is registered and see whether they are allowed to carry out particular activities. You can also use our registers to find an optician in your area. We publish our registers on our website at **www.optical.org**, and you can use them free of charge.

If your optician says they're registered but you can't find them on our registers, it might be because their registered name isn't the same as the name they use at work. If you want to know whether your optician is registered, you can phone our registration team on **020 7580 3898** (choose option one).

You might also see this logo somewhere in your optician's practice, on their website or letters, or on your prescription card. It includes their unique GOC registration number, or that of their practice if it's a registered business.



Only practitioners and businesses which are registered with us are allowed to use our registered logo. Although the logo is not formal proof of registration, it gives you a number so you can check the online registers if you want to do so.

What does the registration number mean?

The prefix (01-, D-, SO-, SD- or CO-) shows which register the optician is on.

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Prefix What it means

- O1 The person listed is a qualified optometrist. They can examine your eyes, test your sight and give you glasses or contact lenses. They can use certain diagnostic drugs, and issue written orders for pharmacists to supply certain medicines to patients.
- D The person listed is a qualified dispensing optician. They can fit and supply spectacles and give you low-vision aids such as eyeglasses, magnifiers and telescopes if you are partially sighted. They are also qualified to fit and supply glasses for children under 16.

Some dispensing opticians are also on a specialist register which allows them to fit and supply contact lenses.
- CO The company listed is a registered business that can work in optometry and supply optical equipment such as glasses and contact lenses, as defined above.
- SO The person listed is a student optometrist. They can examine your eyes, test your sight and prescribe glasses or contact lenses **only** when supervised by a registered optometrist or registered medical practitioner.

SD The person listed is a student dispensing optician. They can fit and supply glasses to children and partially-sighted people **only** when supervised by a registered dispensing optician, an optometrist or a registered medical practitioner.

An individual registration number may change, for example when a student finishes their training and changes register, or if they leave the register and rejoin it at a later date. We keep a record of previous numbers on our database. Each number is unique and we never give it to anyone else.

If your optician visits you at home, they should carry a certificate that says they are registered with us.

How does the GOC protect the public?

We regulate individual opticians and optical businesses who are registered with us to make sure they meet the minimum standards of behaviour, education (including continuing education for opticians who are already qualified) and performance.

We can also investigate complaints about people who are not registered with us, but who are pretending to be opticians, or who are carrying out healthcare activities that only registrants are allowed to do.

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1 Set standards for optical education, training, performance and behaviour

Opticians who want to register with us must meet our standards of knowledge, skill and behaviour. These are set out in two documents, 'Standards in competence' (knowledge and skill) and 'Standards in conduct' (behaviour). Optical businesses that want to register with us must also meet our standards for businesses (these are in the Code of Conduct for Business Registrants). You can get information about these standards on our website at **www.optical.org**.

2 Approve the qualifications that lead to registration

Opticians need training to deliver good standards of eyecare. We assess and approve the courses that students training to be optometrists or dispensing opticians in the UK take to make sure the training meets our standards. We decide what goes into all of the courses and qualifications that lead to being registered with us. We carry out quality-assurance visits to check that the courses and assessments provided by education and examination bodies are achieving our standards.

3 Publish registers of opticians, students training to be opticians and optical businesses in the UK

Optometrists and dispensing opticians must be registered with us to practise in the UK. We publish registers of all optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses who are qualified and fit to practise, train or carry out business. All registrants must have suitable indemnity insurance. They must also complete a minimum amount of Continuing Education and Training (CET) to stay registered and practise.

4 Investigate and act on concerns about anyone registered with us

We can take action if a registrant's 'fitness to practise' may be 'impaired' (negatively affected) due to a number of reasons set out in the Opticians Act 1989, including poor health, behaviour or performance.

5 Investigate and act on complaints that people not on our register are pretending to be opticians, or are carrying out restricted activities

If a person who is not registered with us is pretending to be, or they are carrying out any activities that only registrants are allowed to do (such as eye tests or giving glasses to children aged under 16), we will take appropriate action. We have a policy about how we deal with criminal investigations and prosecutions, which we explain in our Protocol on the Investigation and Prosecution of Criminal Offences. You can see this on our website at www.optical.org.

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Making a complaint about an optician, student or registered business

Our registrants are highly qualified professionals and normally provide excellent services. Sometimes there might be a problem, which could be to do with:

- poor professional performance, such as failing to notice signs of eye disease;
- physical or mental-health problems that affect their work;
- inappropriate behaviour, such as violence or sexual assault;
- being under the influence of alcohol or drugs at work;
- fraud or dishonesty; or
- a criminal conviction or caution.

If you are unhappy with the treatment you've received from your optician, or if you're worried about the behaviour or health of your optician, you should first speak to the practice manager and follow the practice's complaints procedure. If that doesn't solve the problem to your satisfaction, or you don't want to complain to the practice direct, you should tell us.

How do I make a complaint to the GOC?

If you want to make a complaint about one of our registrants, you can find out how to do this in our booklet 'How to complain about an optician'. You can get a copy of this booklet from our website at www.optical.org or by phoning **020 7580 3898** (choose option five).

If one of our registrants does not meet our standards and is not fit to practise because they are not able to do their job safely and effectively, we can stop them from working in the UK (this is often known as 'striking off'). Or, we can restrict the type of work they are allowed to do. Our powers to take this type of action are very similar to the powers that the General Medical Council has over doctors.

If you want to complain about someone who is not on our register but who is pretending to be, or carrying out activities that only our registrants are allowed to do, please phone our fitness to practise team on 020 7580 3898 (choose option five).

What if my problem is with faulty glasses?

Our booklet 'How to complain about an optician' explains the types of complaints that we can deal with. We can't help you with a claim for compensation for faulty glasses or contact lenses. If you have this type of complaint, you should first go back to the practice where you bought the glasses or lenses and follow their complaints procedure. If that doesn't work, the Optical Consumer Complaints Service may be able to help you (their details are at the end of this booklet).

If you are worried about misleading advertising, see '**Other useful contacts**' for information about making a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority.

Contact us

General Optical Council
41 Harley Street
London W1G 8DJ

Phone: 020 7580 3898

Fax: 020 7307 3939

Email: goc@optical.org

Website: www.optical.org

Other useful contacts

Optical Consumer Complaints Service

For help with issues such as getting a refund for faulty glasses, phone the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) on 0844 800 5071 or visit **www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk**.

Advertising Standards Authority

To complain about false or misleading advertising phone the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) on 020 7492 2222 or visit **www.asa.org.uk**.

Citizens Advice

If you are not sure who to complain to, or if you need legal advice, phone Citizens Advice on 020 7833 2181 or visit **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**.

Other languages

You can get this booklet in Welsh by visiting **www.optical.org**.

